



**U.S. Department of Justice**

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**PRESS RELEASE**

Richard S. Hartunian, United States Attorney for the Northern District of New York announced that Susan C. Peters, of Ravena, was sentenced today by Senior United States District Judge Frederick J. Scullin, Jr., to three years probation, with conditions including that she serve six months in home detention and pay restitution to the government in the amount of \$55,201.25, based on her felony conviction for failing to disclose information affecting her continuing right to Social Security payments.

Peters, age 47, pled guilty on March 3, 2010, to withholding information from the Social Security Administration regarding her continued operation of Cherokee Ridge Animal Rescue, Inc. ("Cherokee Ridge") while she was receiving disability payments from approximately 2002 through 2006. At the time of her plea, Peters admitted that Cherokee Ridge was incorporated in the State of New York in April 1999, with defendant Peters as Chief Executive Officer. Thereafter, on or about March 1, 2001, defendant Peters applied for benefits under Title 42, Chapter 7, Subchapter II (Federal Old-Age Survivors, and Disability Insurance Benefits). In that application, defendant Peters certified that she "became unable to work because of [her] disabling condition on March 7, 2000," and that she was "still disabled" as of the date of the application, and she agreed to notify the Social Security Administration (SSA), among other things, if her medical condition improved so that she "would be able to work" or if she went to work "whether as an employee or a self-employed person."

Defendant Peters initially was denied benefits but she appealed, and based upon the information that she provided to the SSA, she was found to be eligible for benefits, which she began receiving in or about November 2002.

However, defendant Peters admitted that, knowing that her continued operation of Cherokee Ridge affected her initial and continuing right to receive payments, she knowingly and willfully continued to conceal and failed to disclose same to the SSA. Upon discovery of her activities, the SSA Office of Inspector General asked that defendant Peters' entitlement to benefits be reexamined in November 2005, and, by decision dated August 15, 2006, the Administrative Law Judge concluded that she had "concealed information meeting the criteria for reopening [her prior eligibility determination] under fraud or similar fault," and that her activities at the animal rescue "constitute[d] substantial gainful activity" within the meaning of the applicable SSA regulations and rendered her ineligible for benefits. The total amount obtained by defendant Peters as a result of this activity from in or about November 2002 through in or about October 2006 was \$66,452, and the restitution amount ordered due by the Court today reflected credit for moneys withheld and obtained from defendant Peters prior to sentencing.

Defendant Peters previously was found guilty after trial in Coeyman's Town Court of 18 misdemeanor counts of animal cruelty in March 2006, and was sentenced to 60 days in jail and three months probation. Thereafter, in May 2006, she was sentenced to one year in jail to run consecutively to her prior sentence for criminal contempt related to that case.

The investigation in this matter was conducted by the local SSA Office of Inspector General, and the case was prosecuted by the United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of New York.

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